



Health Advisory

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SUVs and Driveways a Deadly Mix for Kids

Utah Department of Health Reveals Increase in Driveway Deaths

(Salt Lake City, UT) – The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) is issuing an advisory to all drivers: Watch for young children as you back out of the driveway. So far this year, five Utah children have been run over and killed in their own driveways or parking lots – all by high-profile vehicles, such as SUVs, trucks or vans.

The five deaths in 2004 are alarming as the average backover fatality rate for the past seven years has been three. UDOH researchers note that 20 children were killed and 145 seriously injured in Utah yards and driveways from 1997-2003, for an average of 3 deaths and 20 injuries annually. Of the 20 driveway deaths, high-profile vehicles killed 19; a car struck one, clearly showing that a child has very little chance of surviving being run over by an SUV. And, of the 145 injuries, half were run over by cars, the other half by larger vehicles.

“We can track backover deaths because those cases are sent to the medical examiner and studied by the UDOH’s Child Fatality Review Committee,” said Cyndi Bemis, Education Coordinator, Injury Prevention Program, UDOH. The number of injuries is likely higher, as homeowners are not required to report incidents that occur on their property.

“A 2-foot-tall toddler is no match for a 7-ft., 6,000-lb. SUV,” said Bemis. “SUVs are so much taller it’s like driving a school bus. A child would have to be standing across the street to be seen by a driver who’s backing up,” she said. “Any closer and they disappear.”

Adding to the danger is the fact that young children are impulsive and can’t foresee danger. Children who are capable of crawling and walking are at highest risk of driveway backovers. In

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fact, half of all victims over the last seven years were between 12 and 24 months old. At that age, children are very mobile and smart enough to figure out how to open doors to get out of the house – a factor safety advocates call “the bye-bye syndrome.” Children don’t want their parent to leave so they run outside to wave goodbye and the parent thinks the child is still inside.

“It’s clear that high-profile vehicles and young children are a deadly mix,” said Kris Hansen, R.N., Trauma Program Manager, Primary Children’s Medical Center. “The children who don’t die suffer head trauma and crushing injuries that can leave them permanently disabled,” she said. “The injuries suffered by these children are horrific.”

There are simple steps all drivers can take to prevent backovers:

1. Supervise children. Know where they are before you leave home.
2. Always check completely around *any* vehicle, even small cars, before backing out.
3. Consider having another family member watch from outside the vehicle as you back up.
4. Purchase special mirrors that give you a better view of the area behind the vehicle.
5. Purchase a backup warning device that can detect objects in your path. There are several available that can be found on the Internet.
6. Ask a dealer if your vehicle can be retrofitted with a backup warning device.
7. Talk with your children about the importance of staying off the driveway.
8. Talk with grandparents, older siblings and caregivers about checking around the vehicle before backing. The few extra seconds it takes to walk around a vehicle can prevent a lifetime of grief and guilt.

“We lead busy lives,” said Bemis. “And it is tragic when our little ones get lost in the confusion of everyday life,” she said. “But by following these basic rules of prevention, we can go a long way toward reducing the loss of life.”

For more information on driveway backovers, contact the UDOH’s Violence and Injury Prevention Program at 801-538-6348.

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